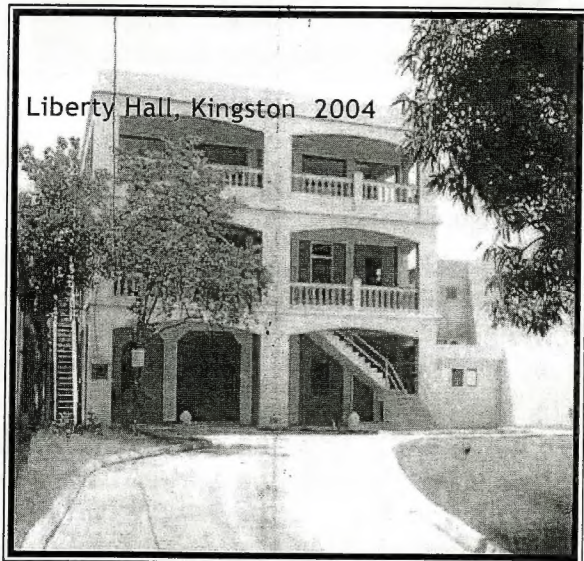


Liberty Hall, Kingston 2004



"Welcome to Liberty Hall, the Cradle of Negro Liberty!"

—Garvey speaking at Liberty Hall, Harlem, 1921

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Liberty Hall: *The Legacy of Marcus Garvey*

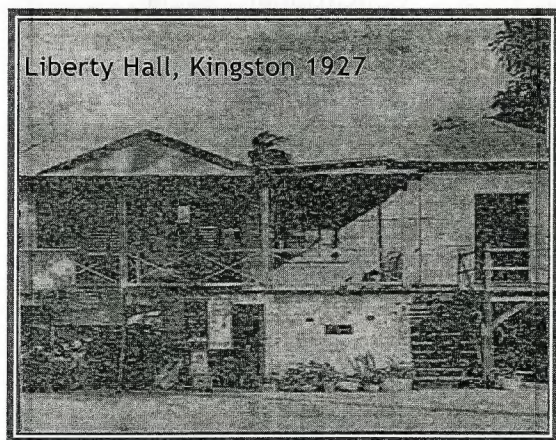
The Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA-ACL) was launched in Jamaica in 1914. By the 1930s there were over a thousand divisions of the UNIA existing throughout the world in many countries where the organization had significant mass followings. By referring to UNIA Records compiled in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers* vol. VII we may surmise that there were about 1052 UNIA Divisions active between 1921 and the 1930s. Their global distribution was as follows:

The United States of America	840
Canada	21
Central and South America	83
The Caribbean	84
Africa	18
Europe (Great Britain)	5
Australia	1
<hr/>	
Total	1052

Source: *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers* Vol. VII, edited by Robert Hill (University of California Press, 1990) pgs. 986-1000.

These divisions were required to have 'Liberty Halls.'

This property at 76 King Street, Kingston was established as the headquarters of the Kingston Division of the UNIA in July 1923. In Jamaica, the UNIA had several other divisions, which included those at Bog Walk and Spanish Town in St. Catherine, Golden Grove and Morant Bay in St. Thomas, Port Antonio and Swift River in Portland, Resource in Manchester, Montego Bay in St. James. There was also a St. Andrew division existing alongside the Kingston Division.



Liberty Hall was a multipurpose facility. It housed the administrative offices of the Kingston Division, a laundromat, a lunchroom, a canteen, a job placement service and a co-operative bank. It was also the meeting place of various units of the UNIA such as the Black Cross Nurses, the Juveniles and the African Legion. Essentially, in the racially constraining colonial environment, Liberty Hall was the

mecca to which black Jamaicans could flock and participate in the programme of the UNIA – the redemption of Africans both on the continent and in the Diaspora. At Liberty Hall, black people had a voice, they had importance. Liberty Hall was their very own social club and intellectual centre. The events that took place ranged from meetings, lectures and debates to cultural programmes. Upon his return to Jamaica in 1927, following his deportation from the U.S.A, Marcus Garvey spoke to an enormous crowd gathered here, announcing his intention to carry on the work of the UNIA in Jamaica. Liberty Hall, Kingston was thus Marcus Garvey's centre of operations for a while.

In 1927, George O. Marke, a member of the international executive body of the UNIA, along with some other officers successfully sued the Parent Body in the USA for back-payment of salaries. In 1929, Marke who had been unsuccessful in attaining what was due to him in the U.S. brought his case to Jamaica. The Jamaican Supreme Court ruled that this suit could be upheld against the UNIA's assets in Jamaica. Despite appeals, Liberty Hall was seized and sold at public auction in September 1929 to Mr. Elias Alexander. A month later, Alexander sold Liberty Hall to Mr. Altamont Dolphy, a prominent merchant of Kingston.

In 1930, the Supreme Court reversed its 1929 decision, ruling that the UNIA body in New York had no claim to the property of the Kingston Division. Liberty Hall was restored. Though a number of UNIA activities shifted

to Edelweiss Park, 67 Slipe Road, which became the international headquarters of the UNIA in 1929, Liberty Hall continued its role as a significant part of the UNIA's Programme. On March 22, 1933, Garvey along with some of Kingston's civic leaders and prominent citizens laid the foundation stones for the present concrete structure, which replaced the original wooden one.



Marcus Garvey left Jamaica in 1935 and settled in England where he died in 1940. Liberty Hall however, remained operational. It was a main entertainment centre for decades and provided an outlet for budding musicians. It was also a popular sporting arena particularly for boxing and was host to many Caribbean pugilists. Liberty Hall was eventually sold by the members of the Kingston Division of the UNIA. Over the decades the building fell into disrepair.

In 1987 the property was purchased by the Jamaica National Heritage Trust and plans were made for its reconstruction as

a historical site. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture, The Friends of Liberty Hall, The Jamaica National Heritage Trust and the Institute of Jamaica collaborated to restore Liberty Hall to its former glory. The newly refurbished building was finally opened on October 20, 2003.

The building now houses the Garvey Multimedia Museum; a Multimedia Computer Centre; the Garvey Research/Reference Library and a Museum Shop. Liberty Hall will once again be a significant educational, social, cultural and intellectual centre and a living monument to the Right Excellent Marcus Mosiah Garvey.

Quiz

When and where was the UNIA-ACL launched?

Why was Liberty Hall auctioned in 1929?

What is a 'Living Monument'?

Where in Jamaica was Edelweiss Park?

In what year was the newly refurbished Liberty Hall opened?

What are some of the facilities offered at Liberty Hall today?